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SUBJECT: KUWAITI CANDIDATE FOR WHO DIRECTOR-GENERAL

REF: KUWAIT 2838

¶1. (SBU) On November 1 DCM attended a meeting called by Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Dr. Muhammad Al-Sabah. Purpose of the meeting was to present to heads of diplomatic missions Kuwait's case for selection of Dr. Kazem Behbehani as the next WHO Director. The Foreign Minister made a presentation drawing on the following points in support of Dr. Behhehane's candidacy:

--Behbehani's professional qualifications and many years of experience within the WHO;

--the principle of regional rotation (Middle East/Mediterranean region has never had leadership of the WHO);

--the benefits of giving smaller countries the opportunity to occupy UN leadership positions;

--the cultural understanding to be gained by having a Muslim WHO Director-General;

--Kuwait's exceptional record of positive engagement with the UN and international agencies;

--Kuwait's record of assistance to developing countries, including, the Foreign Minister noted, a pledge of \$300 million just approved by the cabinet to combat hunger in Africa.

¶2. (SBU) Noting that some of the countries represented at the meeting had put forward their own candidates, Dr. Muhammad said Kuwait would regard having Dr. Behbehani make the short-list of 5 as a victory. He appealed for the support to achieve that goal. He also noted that the Arab League was supporting Dr. Behbehani's candidacy; another Arab candidate had withdrawn in favor of the Kuwaiti candidate.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: The GOK has attached special significance to Dr. Behbehani's candidacy and has lobbied repeatedly at all levels to promote Kuwait's case. USG backing for Dr. Behbehani would generate great appreciation from Kuwait and would signal our own appreciation for the unique support Kuwait provides us in this region.
LeBaron